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ABSTRACT

This digest presents seven strategies that an assessment director may use to improve test administration practices. These strategies highlight clear communication, the responsibility of the Building Test Coordinator, and rewarding and reinforcing quality. The strategies are: (1) focusing on communication; (2) designating a building test coordinator; (3) meeting with all building test coordinators; (4) designing processes to reward quality; (5) using "quality" techniques; (6) designing goals, processes, and procedures with information, responsiveness, teamwork, standards, and other quality aspects in mind; and (7) working for continual improvement in processes. (SLD)

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# Strategies for Improving the Process of Educational Assessment

*M. Kevin Matter*
*Cherry Creek Co. Public Schools*

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# Strategies for Improving the Process of Educational Assessment

*M. Kevin Matter*
*Cherry Creek Co. Public Schools*

Test administration is an essential part of the educational assessment process, yet it often does not receive enough attention. Because teachers and principals are concerned with many components of the testing process, it is important for the assessment office to focus attention on test administration. This digest presents seven strategies that the assessment director may employ to improve test administration practices. These strategies highlight clear communication, the responsibility of the Building Test Coordinator, and rewarding and reinforcing quality. The administration process from school staff's perspective and the needs of the assessment office are both addressed.

## Communicate--Communicate--Communicate

Parents and teachers rarely learn how results are used to improve curriculum, instruction, or individual student learning plans. Assessment offices and school districts have a responsibility to provide them with that information. Develop a year-long communication plan for school staffs, parents, and the community. It is important for everyone affected by the assessment process to be continually informed. They should know what tests are being administered, the purpose of the tests, what the past results show, and how the current results are used to improve student performance.

Tailor the information to fit the needs of the audience. Providing teachers and principals with test administration checklists, manuals, and reports to meet the assessment office needs for standardization and efficiency is not enough. They should be provided with information that meets their needs as customers of the test: how will the test impact their students, curriculum, and district? Briefly communicating to them the assessment impact reinforces the teamwork that is needed to ensure an assessment system that is both used and useful.

## Designate a Building Test Coordinator

The key to both administration and processing quality is a team which includes a Building Test Coordinator at each school. This person is responsible for administering test materials, overseeing the test administration process, and providing the assessment office with quality materials. The Building Test Coordinator works as a liaison between the assessment office and the school.

Appoint qualified staff to assist the Building Test Coordinator with materials and with administration and scoring issues. This additional help will free the Building Test Coordinator to maintain ongoing communication with the assessment office much more easily. Have someone with a more flexible schedule assume responsibility for issuing materials. Possible choices for this position are the clerical staff, a teacher assistant, or a counselor. The administrative/scoring role may be filled by either a teacher or an administrator, as long as the person is knowledgeable about or will be trained in the technical and instructional issues of assessment.

Do not use the principal as Building Test Coordinator. Although it is important that the principal remain informed and involved in the assessment process--especially regarding deadlines and requirements -- the best role for the principal is to support the Building Test Coordinator by providing extra help and resources.

## Meet with ALL Building Test Coordinators

Require all Building Test Coordinators to attend a brief overview meeting with the assessment staff. To keep the Building Test Coordinator informed, regularly share what works in the school or district, such as providing extra clerical time before and after testing days.

Do not send test materials through the mail. Provide all test materials at the meeting (except test booklets). Walk through all expectations (coordinator and teacher checklists, materials list, materials check-out sheet, administration directions) at the meeting.

Make the Building Test Coordinator personally responsible for the test materials. Before testing begins, communicate that the Building Test Coordinator must ensure that the materials provided meet the acceptable standards. Require the Building Test Coordinator to personally deliver the answer sheets after the testing (or arrange area "drop-off" locations around your district). Schedule a time for check in.

Develop a process to inspect the test result materials. Whenever possible, provide the Building Test Coordinator with options for the school (e.g., hiring part-time staff to prepare the completed materials). Explain that unacceptable materials will either be returned to the school, or schools will be charged for processing time. Use area check-in locations throughout the district, as needed.

Stress quality of test result materials. Explain the consequences of poor quality of materials returned by the Building Test Coordinator. Also emphasize the consequence of a particularly long turnaround time. Provide examples of what "good materials" look like (answer sheets completed correctly, header sheets completed, etc.). Explain that good input at the teacher/school level can alleviate hours of time at the assessment staff level.



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**Design Processes to Reward Quality**

Recognize a job well done. Find out what is rewarding to the Building Test Coordinator and do that! Examples of inexpensive tokens of appreciation include:

- Gift certificates from a book store
- Certificates of appreciation
- Letters of thanks to supervisors
- Thank You party
- Feedback on materials returned

Delaying the reports or results from one testing location because of problems with other teachers or schools "punishes" high quality work. If feedback deadlines are observed, schools will be quickly rewarded for their efforts.

**Use "Quality" Techniques**

Use an effective system of deadline dates. Good procedures include several "waves" of processing and reporting, with deadline dates determined by the time that is needed to properly collect and prepare materials for delivery to the testing office. Test coordinators will know the deadlines and understand the relationship between the date and quality of how materials were submitted for processing and the date the results are received.

Remember the Golden Rule. Assessment offices may be viewed by teachers and principals as "the enemy" if practices involve high stakes accountability and unfair treatment. To counteract these perceptions, assessment processes must be developed that involve the "user/customer" throughout the entire process, not just at the end.

**The assessment office must design goals, processes, and procedures with the following in mind:**

**Information:** All information that is provided must be timely and understandable. Materials should meet the needs and expectations of the user.

**Responsiveness:** Assessment staff must be accessible at times that are conducive to the culture of the school and the time demands placed on the teacher, the principals, and other staff.

**Input:** Ask for feedback whenever possible, particularly when the user is qualified to comment on the quality of the material. Act on this feedback, making the necessary improvements.

**Teamwork:** Teachers, principals, parents, and assessment offices must work together. Communicate the idea that performance at one school affects other schools in the district.

**Rapid turnaround:** Reward schools by providing rapid processing and reporting of results. Late is almost identical to never with assessment results.

**Reports:** Spend the additional time and resources necessary to customize reports for each audience. The payoff for reports that are understandable is actual use of the results.

**Useful and usable information:** Create staff development and training for teachers, principals, school staff, and parents that is focused on assessment results they need and value.

**High standards:** Demonstrate that the high standards that apply to others apply to the assessment office processes and procedures as well. Take prompt action to rectify identified problems.

**Continual Improvement in Processes**

Efforts to improve administration, processing, and reporting take several years. Plan for incremental steps to change behavior by rewarding and reinforcing quality results. Keep a log of good practice ideas; use this to reduce variation and problems when using a particular process. Be positive, but expect new problems to occur even as others are reduced.

Involve the entire assessment staff in the planning process, as well as key representatives from the various internal and external audiences. Allow assessment offices to be seen as "a part of," rather than "apart from" the schools and teachers. Consider the point of view of all involved in the assessment process.

Communicate continuously with assessment staff, building administrators, central office, and as much as possible with the test coordinators and teachers. Convince them of the benefits of improvements in the entire assessment process--more usable information, at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

**Additional Reading**


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